

What is the number 1 cause of death of cats and dogs in America? Cancer? Hit by car? Respiratory or heart disease? Old age?

The number 1 cause of death of cats and dogs in America is euthanasia.

“There is no disease or condition of companion animals that takes more of their lives than euthanasia.”
-Janet M. Scarlett, DVM, MPH, PhD, Professor of Epidemiology at Cornell University

Feral cats in the City of Spartanburg now have a better chance of escaping the fate of euthanasia than almost any other municipality in the South. Not just South Carolina, but the entire region! The reason is a partnership between Spartanburg Animal Services, the city animal control department headed by Major Steve Lamb, and Animal Allies, a low-cost, high-quality spay/neuter clinic. More specifically, the determination of Major Lamb to find a solution to the high number of nuisance calls his officers responded to weekly. After discussions with community residents, veterinarians, current feral colony caretakers, and studying the "Trap-Neuter-Return" (called TNR) methods used widely in other areas of the country, Major Lamb and his staff launched their TNR initiative in the City of Spartanburg in January 2013.

Prior to that new program, cats who were captured as a result of complaints were brought to the local shelter and most of them were killed. For instance, in 2012, 78% of the 624 cats and kittens brought to the shelter by Spartanburg Animal Services were killed. Major Lamb, through discussions with residents who had been looking at TNR as a solution, wanted to make his department more of a community partner and help alleviate these sad statistics. With a view toward saving taxpayer monies and a more effective method of addressing stray and feral cats in the City of Spartanburg, he recognized that trapping the cats, having them spayed or neutered and vaccinated, and returning them to the locations where they were living and thriving may be the solution he sought.

With a private grant from PetSmart Charities and a partnership with Animal Allies, Major Lamb's staff began transporting captured cats to the clinic for treatment. Because Animal Allies was set up to efficiently provide spay/neuter and vaccination/testing services they were able to accommodate the number of cats from the community. Between January and April 2013, 150 feral cats were trapped, vaccinated, spayed/neutered/eartipped for identification and returned to their living areas.

Now, 18 months later, the results are in. Because of the presence of a spay/neuter clinic ready to do business with the municipality, and an animal control department focused on solutions -- there has been a zero percent kill rate of healthy cats and kittens that Spartanburg Animal Services has trapped.

In the 2 years prior to the TNR program, Animal Services responded to 810 cat complaint calls, more than 15 per week. Since the inception of the TNR program, those calls have dropped to 2 or 3 a week, freeing animal control officers to deal with more serious issues. The city has embraced the humane solution to free-roaming cats, Major Lamb states there has been "zero negativity" from the community. They are on target to provide medical services to the more than 750 cats the initial grant allows. "It's our view that feral cats are not homeless," he says. "They already have a home, it's in our community."

Any proposed legislation to curtail or interfere with the business practices and financial health of spay/neuter organizations would prove fatal to proactive programs such as this one in the City of Spartanburg. Additionally, other municipalities in South Carolina who may be looking at similar programs to enhance the quality of life for their cats and residents, and to provide better services for taxpayers may be put off by any barriers which may arise from unintended consequences of legislation. I urge you to let the organizations which are delivering these services to thrive uninhibited by stifling regulations. The veterinarians who perform these spay/neuter surgeries and provide wellness and preventative care for the animals they see during these appointments have graduated from the same veterinary colleges as their colleagues in private practice. They have passed the same strict South Carolina licensing requirements as their colleagues in private practice. It should not be up to legislators to interfere with their professional judgments and curtail the services they deem necessary to provide their patients with the best quality of medical care they can.